

I -Search: An Innovative Critical Thinking Method for Developing Writing Skill

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Introduction

Writing skill is essential for every student for academic or non academic purpose. During their course of study students have to write an essay, or a paper or an article on a particular topic. Such writing is usually written as part of coursework to fulfill the requirement of their study programs or as a part of assessment. The art of good writing, not only demonstrates the quality and efficiency of a particular student; but also it lies in having something interesting to say and saying. It clarifies concisely and with conviction. (Payne & Whittaker, 2000:203)

Advocates of whole language approaches believe that learning to read and write in a natural process is essential for balancing in reading and writing as well. (Woolfolk, 2006:492) In traditional or conventional teaching, the teacher doesn't teach writing process but s/he always tells students to write which creates boredom and confusion among students. In order to teach "small ideas" the teacher used to teach "big ideas" which makes students lazy and non creative. So the teaching "simple and small ideas" plays crucial role for active learning and developing Critical Thinking (CT) in real classroom. In this connection the focus of this paper is to discuss the simple ways of writing rather than presenting expertise on different paradigm of writing skills.

Critical Thinking and I -Search Technique

There are different type of thinking, such as concrete thinking, abstract thinking, reflective thinking, creative thinking and Critical Thinking. Among them Critical Thinking is a higher order well disciplined thought process, which involves the use of cognitive skills like conceptualization, interpretation, analysis and evaluation for arriving at an unbiased, valid and reliable judgment of the gathered or communicated information or data as a guide to one's belief and action. (Mangal,2005:364) Furthermore, Facione(1990) states that CT is essential as a tool of inquiry. As such, CT is a liberating force in education and a powerful resource in one's personal and civic life. CT may be distinguished from genres or ordinary thinking in many ways. It focuses on the higher order thinking. Most of the classes run instruction only on knowledge level, but it needs to be equipped students' abilities with understanding application etc. (Wash & Paul,1986; Payne & Whittaker, 2000). To develop such capacities it requires innovative teaching techniques, among these "I- search" is one innovative CT method for developing effective writing skills.

Teaching writing is not an easy job and most of the teacher do not feel comfortable it . (Walsh & Poul, 1986:41) This may be evident in our Nepalese context also “I-Search” is one of the strategy of CT methodology to cope with this problem. Such types of writing strategies address the portion of learning concerned with synthesis and application of knowledge.(Allister,2009:7)

The writing Process & I-search Technique.

In this technique students describe what they already know about their topic when they begin their search .Also they state a question to which they really wanted to find answers.(Nicu,2007) “I-Search” is one of the effective and successful approaches that can be taught in writing to all grades and ages, including primary grades. (Crawford, et.at., 2005) .This method contain the following five steps.

- Rehearsing
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Publishing

1 Rehearsing

This is the first stage of writing article/ essay etc., in which student tries find a topic, gathering information, collecting one’s thought about the topic. I-Search rubric is the effective way for rehearsing, as follows

Rubric for I-Search strangely

Question	View of colleges (i.e.5 colleagues view	Book/Journal
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Besides the above table the following ways can be effective for rehearsing.(Race,2003)

- Brainstorming on working title
- Linking topic with ideas & experiences
- Rating of ideas
- Reviewing own identified possibilities
- Getting feedback draft ideas

In this stage students should get an opportunity to think freely and they will decide their own topic according to their interest and understanding.

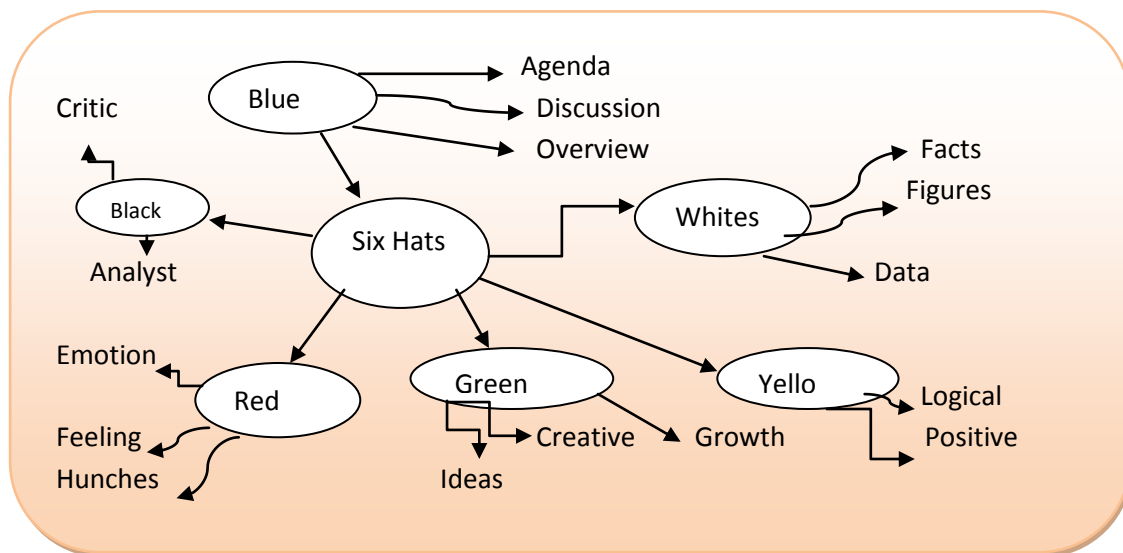
2. Drafting

After selecting topic and collecting information related to the topic, the students try to set ideas on paper as initial form of writing .So it is the stage of “Writing and review” of draft article or essay .In this stage the students prepare their draft individually .There is an effective strategy for writing article by Edward de Bono (1985), He identifiedSix Thinking Hats” method. This is powerful technique that helps students look at important decisions from a number of different perspectives .It helps them make better decisions by forcing them to move outside their habitual ways of thinking .These “Hats” represent six thinking strategies. Each ‘Thinking Hat’ is a different style of thinking, named for a color that is mnemonically, descriptive of the perspective one adopts, when wearing the particular hat. (After discussing) about six hats the students are asked to wearing each hat, i.e. may be a written piece of paper, and to follow the instruction given by the teacher for writing practice)

Six Thinking Hats by Edward De Bono (1985)

- Blue Hat
- Red Hat
- White Hat
- Yellow Hat
- Green Hat

(N.B. the presentation order of these six hats can be changed but above order is effective for writing practice.)



Here is an example about the topic on “CT strategies and it’s application in our conventional classroom teaching.”

a. Blue Hat

Look how you can structure your draft. This blue hat focuses on reflection, metacognition , and the needs to manage the thinking process. The blue hat stand for process control.

e.g. the above topic can be structured on these sections

- Introduction
- C T strategies
- CT and tradition teaching
- CT and it's application
- Conclusion

b. Red Hat

Look at a topic from the point of view of emotions, feelings and hunches .Present views without justification and explanation. ‘Wearing’ red hat, you look at problems using intuition, reaction and emotion .Also try to think how other people will react emotionally. Also try to understand the responses of people who do fully know your reasoning.

e.g. in the above topic

- More knowledge on CT and it's application
- Interest,
- Resource book's arranging skills
- CT application, practice and result (From research)
- Experts' feedback for final form

c. White Hat

With this thinking hat, you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it .Look for gaps in your knowledge, and either try to fill them or take account of them .This is where you analyze past trends and try to extrapolate from historical data.

e.g. in above topic

- there is curiosity and newness
- aim to see and change practice of CT strategies
- you can find to know difference
- you can know the cause of ineffectiveness of current practices

d. Black Hat

Be pessimistic, identify your own weakness .Wearing black hat, look at all the bad points and weakness of your writing .Look at it cautiously and defensively .This is important because it highlights the weak points in a writing .It allows you to eliminate them .

e.g. In above topic, we can see

- Weakness on organizing structure /pattern
- Sequential presentation
- Correcting grammar
- Including research finding
- Students' / Principal's reaction
- References

e. Yellow Hat

Look at your draft optimistically .This hat helps you to think positively .It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the strong points benefit of your writing.

e.g. In above topic.

- It's new article
- It looks possibilities of CT application in classroom instruction
- Identifies of burning issues of instruction
- It develops confidence in writing
- It is simple writing and easy to understand

f. Green Hat

Add creative and new ideas to your draft and value to your article .So this hat stands for creativity and imagination. Therefore it is a freewheeling way of thinking and you try to see such creative ideas in your draft.

e.g. Above topic is

- Is more resourceful
- Is based on research
- By consulting many books /journals
- Practiced by other countries
- It finds innovative ways to apply CT strategies in classroom

3. Revising

Revising is for better writing rather than correcting grammar. While revising, the writer usually requires distance of themselves from their work .It can be done by holding conferences with other writers teachers etc. While practicing writing in classroom, this can be easily done by discussing with their friends.

4. Editing

This is the final stage of writing in which, the writers make their article presentable before it is made public. When you have revised your writing several times and you are happy with the content and organization, look over your sentences very carefully one last time for grammatical mistakes, missing punctuation, spelling errors and typographical errors. Finally try reading your writing /article out loud to hear how it sounds.

5 . Publishing

Publishing, or sharing work with other may create interests in others and the writer receives feedback from them .The prospect of sharing with others can make students write, rewrite, make smooth and refine-specially if they have seen other students' work with appreciation and it enables that to see what their colleagues are doing (Crawford, e. t.al 2005) three are different ways for publishing such as:

- Publish in bulletin board
- School newspaper
- Journals and newspaper
- School library (Notice board)
- Send it to friends by mail or e-mail
- Organizing discussing session .etc.

Conclusion

I am not a student of ELT, however I have a keen interest on pedagogical reformation in reading and writing through CT strategies .So I have prepared this article based on my understanding. The important thing is that I was very much impressed from the writing technique “I- Search” using Bono s “six thinking hats”. I believe and find this technique effective from my self practices in classroom .So I think this is an innovative way to flourish students' writing potentialities in a simple way.

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